

# Creating a Student-Centered Classroom



*A few things to consider when creating a student-centered classroom...*

## **Student Motivation:**

Traditionally three styles of motivation are recognized: **goal-oriented**, **relationship-oriented**, and **learning-oriented**.

Your teaching should attempt to reach students who have any of these motivations. It's easy to engage students who are **learning-oriented** because they learn for the sake of learning. They are self-motivated and will work hard to understand and apply most anything offered to them. They may become frustrated when asked to create a finished product because this may be viewed as a cessation of learning.

Students who are **relationship-oriented** usually engage in learning as a way to interact with others. They enjoy the social aspect of education. They often enjoy working in pairs and in groups. They want to connect with others. Some of these students want to connect with their peers, but some are looking for a close connection with their instructor – either to obtain approval or to feel noticed and appreciated. **Be careful**, relationship-oriented students can be led astray by peer influences. Several vocal students who are negative about your course or its content can sway these students to feel the same way.

**Goal-oriented** students ask themselves, “What’s in it for me?” You need to provide them with good reasons for learning the concepts presented in your course. Different students have different goals, so be sure that you offer a variety of purposes that learning the content serves such as:

- its usefulness in their upcoming profession
- its application to standing out as a candidate for a future job
- its usefulness as a foundation for an upcoming required course
- skills that will serve them in other aspects of their lives

Conner, Marcia. *Learnativity*. n.d. April 2008. <http://marciaconner.com/assess/learningstyle/>  
Additional info available from: <http://marciaconner.com/assess/motivationstyle/>  
Tips for Motivating Students <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/motivating-students/>

## Strategies for Motivating Students:

Following are some research-based strategies for motivating students to learn.

- **Become a role model for student interest.** Deliver your presentations with energy and enthusiasm. As a display of your motivation, your passion motivates your students. Make the course personal, showing why you are interested in the material.
- **Get to know your students.** You will be able to better tailor your instruction to the students' concerns and backgrounds, and your personal interest in them will inspire their personal loyalty to you. Display a strong interest in students' learning and a faith in their abilities.
- **Use examples freely.** Many students want to be shown why a concept or technique is useful before they want to study it further. Inform students about how your course prepares students for future opportunities.
- **Use a variety of student-active teaching activities.** These activities directly engage students in the material and give them opportunities to achieve a level of mastery.
  - Teach by discovery. Students find as satisfying as reasoning through a problem and discovering the underlying principle on their own.
  - Cooperative learning activities are particularly effective as they also provide positive social pressure.
- **Set realistic performance goals** and help students achieve them by encouraging them to set their own reasonable goals. Design assignments that are appropriately challenging in view of the experience and aptitude of the class.
- **Place appropriate emphasis on testing and grading.** Tests should be a means of showing what students have mastered, not what they have not. Avoid grading on the curve and give everyone the opportunity to achieve the highest standard and grades.
- **Be free with praise and constructive in criticism.** Negative comments should pertain to particular performances, not the performer. Offer nonjudgmental feedback on students' work, stress opportunities to improve, look for ways to stimulate advancement, and avoid dividing students into sheep and goats.
- **Give students as much control over their own education as possible.** Let students choose paper and project topics that interest them. Assess them in a variety of ways (tests, papers, projects, presentations, etc.) to give students more control over how they show their understanding to you. Give students options for how these assignments are weighted.

## Student Engagement:

Once you have motivated students to be interested in what you are teaching, remember that you want to focus on *learning*. This means that the student is being guided to discover the concepts that you want them to learn. You are not the “sage on the stage” but rather the student’s guide or facilitator. Your job is to:

- provide students with opportunities to explore new information and concepts
- create or provide a context for exploring these new concepts
- activate prior knowledge that students may have relative to the concepts being explored – help students to tap into this knowledge

- help students to identify what’s relevant and important
- provide opportunities to practice and explore
- guide students to learn from one another’s experiences
- provide timely and constructive feedback
- guide students to make connections
- facilitate student reflection so students become cognizant of:
  - what they have discovered
  - the connections they have made
  - their learning process
- guide students to organize and synthesize the connections made
- guide students to construct new meaning (knowledge)
- guide students to transfer new meaning to other contexts

**Student Skills:**

A student-centered classroom requires the nurturing of the following student skill set:

- Communication Skills – students need to be able to learn from each other, to identify and verbalize ideas in order to share them with each other and with the class as a whole.
- Team or Group Skills – students need to be able to learn cooperatively, to be part of the process of creating a product instead of the sole owner of the product created.
- Self-directed Learning Skills – students need to be able to look for information on their own and to explore concepts in a manner that is appropriate to a particular task.

In a student-centered classroom these skills should be taught, practiced, and encouraged on a regular basis.

A Teaching-centered/Learning-centered Comparison

<b>Teaching-centered</b>	<b>Learning-Centered</b>
Transfer knowledge	Acquire knowledge
Teacher focused	Student focused
Static and fixed	Dynamic and flexible
Teaching objectives	Learning Outcomes
Providing answers	Asking questions
Leading students	Guiding students
Passive students	Active students

Chart adapted from Problem Based Learning materials created by Nathalie Ummels.